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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ARMY COMMANDERS PREPARE FOR TWO KINDS
OF WAR IN JAFFNA

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Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle. Reasons 1.4 (B&D)

11. (S) Summary: On January 10, poloff accompanied Defense Attach to Security Forces Headquarters Jaffna (SFHQJ) at the Palaly military base on the Jaffna peninsula. During the three hour visit poloff and DATT met with the commanding general, received a tactical briefing and attended a frank needs assessment with commanders of two brigades deployed in Jaffna. While a direct attack is clearly not imminent, Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) security forces are preparing for a conventional thrust by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as well as continuing to deal with guerrilla attacks by smaller LTTE cells and their irregular supporters.

The need to counter these two threats has swollen troop strength in the peninsula to almost 40,000 soldiers. While all commanders felt confident in their ability to withstand an LTTE offensive, they displayed a troubling lack of intelligence about LTTE positions just beyond their lines, and were frank about their equipment deficiencies. Our interlocutors interpreted the upswing in violence as a Tiger attempt to gain bargaining power and predicted that any conventional attack would also be a limited grab for leverage prior to negotiations. End summary.

Lay of the Land

12. (U) A map of the Jaffna peninsula can be found in the palm of your hand. Raise your right forearm, palm facing you and cock your hand to the left. Point Pedro would be where the thumb joins the hand, the Palaly military complex is the first joint of the index finger, Jaffna town is where the pinky joins the palm. Chavakachcheri falls around the middle of the bottom edge of the palm. The Army Forward Defensive Line (FDL) is where your watch or bracelet would hang. Like the two bones in the forearm there are two land approaches up to the peninsula. The center of the forearm where the veins and tendons are is a series of lagoons, swamps and tidal marshes. The critical A-9 highway runs along the lower thicker bone while the thinner upper bone of the arm is a long undeveloped spit of land similar to a barrier island. The infamous Elephant Pass, where the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) took a drubbing in April 2000, despite having tanks and total air superiority, would be the elbow.

Not Expecting Rain, Still Carrying Umbrella

13. (S) On January 10, DATT and poloff flew to the Palaly military complex on the Jaffna peninsula for a three-hour tour. Newly appointed commander of security forces in Jaffna, MGEN Chandrasiri, outlined the situation. The career tank officer did not believe that a broad LTTE offensive was imminent, but was nonetheless preparing for a limited LTTE incursion to gain leverage during future negotiations. Rather than recapture Jaffna town, he theorized that an attack would occur near Point Pedro, which would put direct pressure on the airfield, port and headquarters in Palaly. He added that the Army had received unconfirmed information of an artillery ranging round being fired in the avenue of approach to Pt. Pedro. Seasonal monsoon rains have submerged many of the positions along the FDL and made the use of tanks of other heavy vehicles impractical, he reported. Chandrasiri speculated that any offensive would come in the next three to four weeks and any gains would have to be consolidated by March when the ground would be dry enough for tank operations. When asked by poloff how long his troops on the line could hold against an LTTE attack, MGEN Chandrasiri replied, "if the line can hold for 48 hours, the Tiger attack will run out of steam." When asked about the ability of his forces to withstand a siege of Jaffna should the LTTE cut the supply lines, he revealed that all three brigades have 30 days rations and ammunition in place. An additional 90 days of supplies are held in the Palaly complex. Standing in front of a map showing SLA positions in Jaffna, the DAO asked where the LTTE position were and the MGEN replied, "I'm not sure."

Violence is the New Peace

14. (S) According to BGEN Zacky, SFHQ Chief of Staff in Jaffna, the current rise in violence is part of a long term LTTE strategy that should have had Jaffna in flames by December 2005; however the armed forces' refusal to be provoked and the reluctance of the general Tamil population to return to war has kept this scenario from igniting. When asked about recent Tamil protests accusing the Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) of the rape and murder of a local teen, Zacky evinced an unsettling dismissive attitude, discounting the unrest as the Navy's problem. According to SLA estimates, 300 LTTE cadres are operating in the greater Jaffna peninsula and some 3000 Tamils had crossed into Tiger-controlled territory in the last four months to receive rudimentary military training ranging between two and twelve days. Most of the daily hand grenade attacks are carried out by these hastily trained homeguards. These reluctant recruits often forget to pull the pin before throwing the poorly aimed grenade. The deadly claymore-style command detonated directed weapons are manufactured by the LTTE in their own factories. These devices contain 20 Kg of explosives pushing a spray of hundreds of steel balls into a soft skinned target like a bus, tractor or foot patrol. Usually detonated by wires, they are increasingly triggered by a remote signal similar to a garage door opener or a cell phone, from a range of up to 300 meters.

15. (C) As the A-9 highway enters the Jaffna peninsula near Chavakachcheri, it branches out to several secondary roads on which the SLA must use over 3000 soldiers daily to protect six possible supply routes, according to Zacky. The actual route used for SLA convoys on any given day is random, but all six must be covered to avoid tipping off the LTTE. A briefing map with an overlay shows most of the recent attacks against the SLA were concentrated in Jaffna town (urban, lots of people, easy to hide) followed by Point Pedro and Chavakachcheri, two locations that are touchstones to the Tamil diaspora. Media reports of resistance in these places are thought to resonate with the Tamil diaspora and spur donations. Another SLA map overlay of over 100 cordon and search operations shows them evenly distributed across the peninsula, indicating that they are more likely to be done at random than based on specific information regarding LTTE operations. The Army confirmed reports of some 300 families

leaving Jaffna into Tiger territory, but dismissed most of them as LTTE plants returning to their side, families with members on active duty with the LTTE or persons feeling guilty for supporting the LTTE and nervous about getting caught.

Send Lawyers, Guns and Money. Hold the Lawyers.

16. (S) MGEN Chandrasiri and two brigade commanders offered the following needs assessment. They cited improved body armor and night vision devices as critical for their FDLs. They lamented the lack of spare parts for their vehicles, particularly night vision systems for their tanks, and tires for their armored vehicles. Even basic heavy trucks would improve their mobility, they asserted. A new radio system to upgrade their existing "Cougar" network would improve their command and control. They requested assistance in jamming signals to foil remotely detonated bombs. Perhaps influenced by Hollywood's image of American intelligence gathering, the commanders asked if the USG could provide some real-time satellite imagery to alert them of any impending LTTE attack. The DATT pointed out that rebuilding their fleet of remotely piloted vehicles would better suit their needs.

Comment

17. (C) The commanders in Jaffna feel ready and confident in their ability to handle the situation. However, the LTTE is nothing if not inventive and unpredictable. While equipped for a conventional fight, the SLA has to face an unconventional threat. Furthermore, the LTTE has highly motivated fighters, while SLA morale, particularly in Jaffna, is harder to measure. The Jaffna commander's apparent lack of knowledge about the opposing forces is troubling, however, and Zacky's suggestion that the Navy's problems were not the Army's problems, if shared by other generals, is worrisome. Improving coordination among the services in Jaffna and developing a tactical intelligence network would further the effectiveness of the troops deployed there.

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